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Voices
from the
Gaps

Anita Richmond Bunkley

Biography

“Romance writers don’t ‘just’ talk about romantic relationships,” Arabesque editor and spokesperson Monica Harris insists (46). This is certainly true of romance writer Anita Richmond Bunkley, who emphasizes the connection between nurturing existing relationships with friends and family and having healthy romantic relationships. In addition, Bunkley incorporates real-life experiences, feelings, and problems into the lives of the African American characters she portrays in her books.

With a Bachelor of Arts degree from Mount Union College in Alliance, Ohio, Bunkley has proven herself as a novelist, inspirational educator, and lecturer. Bunkley’s books are written as historical fiction, in which she weaves real life themes into a historical context.

As a child, Anita longed for stories about African American women who lived, loved, and triumphed in important periods of time. Her longings for those types of stories in return became the theme of her early works. Her later works include themes that address women and the importance of their relationships with other women. Bunkley gives a perfect portrayal of how love nurtures all existing relationships and problems, because in every book she addresses different types of issues to allow her readers exposure to various experiences. This feature gives her readers something to relate to and makes them come back for more.



Quick Facts

- * African-American novelist, lecturer, and educator
- * Published her first novel, *Emily, the Yellow Rose*, in 1989

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Anita Richmond Bunkley

Biography continued

When looking for a novelist that addresses issues like family, love, history, and self-improvement, readers can look to Anita Richmond Bunkley. *Emily, The Yellow Rose* launched her career as an author. This novel is the saga of the woman who helped form a nation and inspire a folk song. Her second novel, *Black Gold*, confronts the issues of greed, obsession, and revenge within two African American families.

In *Wild Embers*, one of the first African American nurses to be accepted in the army goes to Tuskegee Army Airfield to help, only to fall in love with a Tuskegee airman. “The story deals with the experiences and the painful reality of life under the Jim Crow laws of the south while struggling to find happiness in the chaos of war” (Bunkley 1).

Starlight Passage follows a contemporary heroine on her journey to uncover her family history by going back to the places her family members had been and re-walking their footsteps. Focusing on a contemporary theme, *Balancing Act* is a story based on an environmental incident that affected a small Texas town. She tells of one woman’s struggle between keeping her job and being loyal to her family and community.

Steppin’ Out With Attitude: Sister Sell Your Dream, is the title of her first non-fiction book. Bunkley describes this book as “a motivational, practical guide targeted to all woman who want to take charge of their future”(1). In this book she shares her personal story of how she made it happen for herself. She has also written two novellas, published in *Girlfriends* and *Sisters*. In these two books she collaborates with Eva Rutland and Sandra Kitt. The authors provide readers with a look at love between African American women from three different perspectives. Bunkley’s contribution to *Girlfriends* addresses the tremendous bond that transforms women into girlfriends. Her novella in *Sisters* is about two sisters who have lost the men they love and need to find themselves again. Her latest novel, *Relative Interest*, is not a simple romance: in her depiction of heroine Kira Forester, Bunkley explores issues surrounding transracial adoption, as well as of romantic love.



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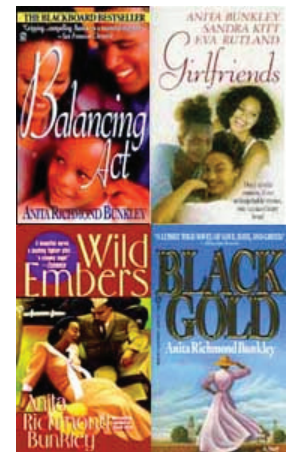
Biography continued

Classic romance writers have painted the picture of the perfect man, and it did not include African American men. Romance writers such as Bunkley introduce black characters such as the “tall, dark, and handsome” hero as well as the “successful, independent, and beautiful” heroine. Because of the controversy set in motion as a result of these African-American images having been introduced to the mainstream, Bunkley’s manuscripts were initially rejected. However, Bunkley beat the odds by self-publishing her first book. This allowed Bunkley to get her foot in the door to which she and many others would eventually have the keys.

African American romance writers indirectly join authors such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Audre Lorde in changing the media’s image of African Americans by creating characters who don’t feed into the gangsta roles often presented. Furthermore, Bunkley’s romantic fiction paints a different picture of the black man, who is often presented as the domestically abusive, absent father. At the same time, women in Bunkley’s fiction do not play stereotypical promiscuous, passive role but are intelligent, assertive, and beautiful characters.

Bunkley realizes that romance writers are often taken for granted, and she is disturbed that they are not taken more seriously. There are many critics who believe that writers of romance aren’t really writers. Critics often describe romance novels as stories just about romantic relationships and not of much importance. They also describe them as boring stories with predictable, happy endings. “When critics argued how boring the ‘predictable’ happy ending was, I always countered that mystery readers knew that there would be a death at the beginning of the story and the murderer would be discovered at the end. No one complained about their literary quality” (Harris 46).

What critics fail to realize is that romance authors put energy, time, and pride into their stories. Bunkley is a disciplined writer who takes her craft seriously. “When on a deadline, I write six hours a day, six days a week, in my home office,” she notes. Her day starts at about 7:30 a.m. and usually winds down by 3:00 p.m. “Then I go to the gym to walk the track and think through my story for the next day’s round” (46). Bunkley is truly a dedicated writer.





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Biography continued

The many readers of romance novels seem to disagree with those who are critical of romance novels. Readers believe that romance stories should be respected. They describe romance novels as “illustration with a guaranteed happy ending of how men and woman relate to each other” (46). “Romance novels give me a chance to escape job pressure and dream of the hero I’d like to meet one day,” says Danielle V. Eaddy, an assistant district attorney in Brooklyn (Woods 75).

The ethnic romance novels that Bunkley and others have written reflect contemporary middle class black people dealing with realistic issues in a romantic context. Ethnic romance writers’ stories portray positive images of black people. Their stories include men, who are similar to real fathers, brothers, sons and friends, as well as a representation of the beauty and intelligence of black women. The increasing numbers of readers of romance novels demonstrate that there is an audience that loves a good romance novel. Bunkley is currently working on a historical novel that travels back in time. This novel features an African-Indian woman who finds herself caught between two cultures, two lovers, and two sides of a war, when civil war erupts in Indian Territory. *TAMA*, a prequel to the novel, can be read online.

Selected Bibliography

Works by the author

Relative Interest (Kensington Publishing Corporation, 2004)

Girlfriends (HarperTorch, 1999)

Steppin’ Out With Attitude: Sister, Sell Your Dream! (Harper Perennial, 1998)

Balancing Act (Dutton Books, 1998)

Starlight Passage (Dutton Books, 1997)

Sisters (with Sandra Kitt and Eva Rutland) (Dutton Books, 1996)

Wild Embers (Dutton Books, 1996)

Black Gold (Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1994)

Emily, The Yellow Rose (Rinard Pub., 1989)